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This publication devoted to Negro American literature contains both critical articles and book reviews. Carl Sandburg's consciousness of and attitude toward the Negro is explored by William A. Sutton; the moral dilemma inherent in slavery as revealed in Charles Waddell Chesnutt's short story, "The Sheriff's Children," is presented by Gerald W. Haslam; Negro drama as illustrated by George Bass's "The Game" is discussed by Darwin T. Turner; and the planning of studies in Negro American literature is the subject of letters from two Benedictine monks. Book reviews treat "Richard Wright: A Biography" (by Constance Webb), "We Build Together" (ed. Charlamae Robbins), "The Negro in Schoolroom Literature" (by Minnie W. Koblitz), "Hold Fast to Your Dream" (by Catherine Blanton), and "Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers" (by Milton J. Shapiro). (JS)

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The illustrations by Eugene Winslow of Charles Waddell Chesnutt and Richard B. Harrison, the original "De Lawd" in Marc Connelly's *Green Pastures,* are taken from *Great Negroes: Past and Present* by Russell L. Adams.

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FRONT COVER: The famous montage of Carl Sandburg's head and face, negatives made by Edward Steichen at the latter's Umpawang Farm in Connecticut while Sandberg ate breakfast two days after he had completely finished *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years.* (By permission of Edward Steichen and the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.)

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PERSONAL LIBERTY ACROSS WIDE HORIZONS: SANDBURG AND THE NEGRO

One of the major preoccupations of Carl Sandburg was Abraham Lincoln, of whom he wrote a monumental biography. As Sandburg wrote of Lincoln in The People, Yes, "He saw personal liberty across wide horizons." And it is this statement which may be used as a keynote of a beginning exploration of Sandburg's consciousness of and attitude toward the Negro.

Undoubtedly the most intense focus of his interest on the subject was in 1919, in the summer of which he was assigned, as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News, to do a series on racial problems in that city. He had barely started the series when racial rioting began. His continued work resulted in sixteen articles, which were gathered into a book, The Chicago Race Riots, July, 1919, published in August of that year with a preface by Walter Lippmann. The book, which is to be reissued in the spring of 1969, is an excellent compendium of problems and solutions, unfortunately too-little heeded in the intervening fifty years.

It is certainly true that the book constitutes, as one of Sandburg's biographers has said, "a clear voice, warning the city that it was dancing carelessly on the edge of a pit, a voice crying out for caution and decency and justice." But it is also true that there is practically no editorializing by Sandburg. One may assume that his sympathies are with the people he quotes, but one has to assume.

The subject matter of the book fits his strenuous reaction against injustices to people. A quarter of a century ago it was said of him, "These things infuriate him, always have infuriated him, always will." More recently a biographer could say, "For Carl Sandburg the fight against anti-Semitism and Negrophobia has been a special project."

It is even true that one of the greater honors accorded Sandburg occurred at the hands of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which in September, 1965, gave him a silver plaque, making him an honorary life member. The only white person to have been so recognized, he was cited as one who had strengthened the vision of the members of the association in its "struggle to extend the frontiers of social justice" and as one who "found beauty in Brotherhood."

However, if one examines the hundreds of occasions where he deals with the Negro in the Lincoln biography, for example, one finds only the most objective of expression. One can read of Forrest's men fighting as though they were "sharing in a race riot, a mass lynching, an orgy of unleashed primitive human animals riding a storm of anger and vengeance directed at their sworn enemy, whom they considered less than human and beyond all laws of civilized war: the Negro." And one may imagine that he is anguished and repelled. But one must imagine.

And he recounts the story of the mulatto, Margaret Garner, the captured runaway slave, who killed one of her children, a little girl almost white in

color, with a butcher knife while awaiting trial. Her explanation of her deed was that she knew it was better for the child to go back to God rather than return to slavery. And one cannot believe that Sandburg does not deeply sympathize.

Also, he quotes without comment the reply of the Negro Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, when asked what was to be done with the millions of emancipated slaves:

> Do nothing with them, mind your own business and let them mind theirs. If you see him ploughing, let him alone. If you see him on his way to school, spelling-book, geography, and arithmetic in hand, let him alone. Don't shut the door in his face. Don't pass laws to degrade him. If he has a ballot in his hands, let him alone. Deal justly with him. He is a human being. Give him wages for his work, and let hunger pinch him if he don't work. "But would you turn him loose?" Certainly. We are no better than the Creator. He has turned them loose. So why should not we?

Anyone who has read Sandburg and knows him in the over all will realize his recognition of this reasonable and unused answer to the problem. But the man whose first book of verses was called In Reckless Ecstasy does not make any similar outcry concerning the problem, which was not solved in his lifetime.

Even though we may think of his expression on this realm of injustice as muted compared to his diatribe on phoney evangelism in To a Contemporary Bunkshooter, it should not be thought traces of attitudes are non-existent, though they will be seen to be limited. He uses the instrumentality of quoting Lincoln in The People, Yes to make the point that intolerance seemed to the Emancipator to be growing to the point where he would consider emigrating to avoid it. He has him point out that, in the draft and race riots of 1864, working people had hanged other working people. He quotes this reminder: "The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people,of all nations and tongues and kindreds." He quotes his statements that he would be neither slave nor master and that he knew no one who wished to be a slave.

Additionally, he sees the Negro as a tragic and comic two-face, conscious of being bought and sold. He refers to the first Negro who said: "When you see me laughing I'm laughing to keep from crying." And he puts these ideas against the backdrop of the editors who decided the most detestable English word was "Exclusive."

Sandburg's attitudes toward the Negro are clear enough, ones of acceptance and sympathy, but he does not make their cause a crusade and a matter of special emphasis anywhere in his work. And his great body of poems is no exception. The few poems which deal directly and identifiably with the Negro are based on a local-color interest, poems which to the more aggressive civil rights worker of 1968 would seem as red flags. Indicative titles will suffice: Nigger, Singing Nigger, Jazz Fantasia. These poems give no suggestion of his recognition of the massive social injustice through which generations of Negroes had lived and were living.

The protest is not completely lacking; it may be seen in a limited form in one poem, Lavender Lilies, and in a diffused form in two more, Early Lynching and Timesweep. In Lavender Lilies he paints a scene in Garfield Park in Chicago, the statue of Lincoln depicted in a beautiful setting on a lovely morning. "And the headline of my newspaper said, 'Thirty dead in race riots.'" Early Lynching owes its only certain relationship to racial problems to the figurative tie between lynching and crucifixion, starting with the line: "Two Christs were at Golgotha." The one Christ has the "smell of the slums" on him.

Timesweep contains as much of an answer as has been provided as to why the rage Sandburg felt against mistreatment of people did not more often and more vividly focus on the affairs of the Negro. In a very generalized way he makes the point that all creatures are part of the same creation. He concludes the poem by saying that the children of one Maker cover the earth and that they

are "named All God's Children."

It is evident that Douglass' solution is accepted completely and, interestingly, unspectacularly by Sandburg, that, by rights, Negroes are, naturally, entitled to the same treatment as anyone else. The puzzle is that this major social problem, of which he was completely and sympathetically aware, did not get more specific and insistent expression in his great lifetime utterance on behalf of broad personal freedom and justice.

William A. Sutton
Department of English
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

"THE SHERIFF'S CHILDREN": CHESNUTT'S TRAGIC RACIAL PARABLE

No American literary product of the nineteenth century more succinctly summarizes the moral dilemma inherent in chattel slavery than does Charles Waddell Chesnutt's short story "The Sheriff's Children." And no other story from that period seems more apt a parable for America's continuing racial crisis than does this tight, metaphorical tale of a good white man's unconscious moral degeneration.

Although he was the first American Negro author to attain a large national literary audience, Chesnutt did not consistently achieve artistic excellence; his novels, for example, are undistinguished. Yet he was a journeyman writer of short fiction who gained a high reputation for his stories of the "blue-veined" society of mulattoes. Occasionally he exhibited literary mastery beyond anything one might expect from a man whose formal education extended only through grade school. "The Sheriff's Children," which was published as part of the collection The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories in 1899, is an early high point in American Negro literature and, though long ignored by critics, is a story deserving consideration for a prominent position in American letters.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1858, Charles W. Chesnutt became a voracious reader after leaving school. He worked as a teacher, a journalist, a court stenographer and, finally, a lawyer, after being admitted to the Ohio bar in 1887. His first published story, "Uncle Peter's House," appeared in 1885. Two years later The Atlantic Monthly introduced him to a national audience when it printed "The Goophered Grapevine." He went on to publish two collections of short stories, The Conjure Woman (1899) and the aforementioned The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories, as well as three novels, The House Behind the Cedars (1900), The Marrow of Tradition (1901), and The Colonel's Dream (1905). In 1899 he also wrote a biography of Frederick Douglass. For reasons never fully explained, he ceased writing in 1905, devoting his time instead to an increasingly distinguished career in law; when he died in 1932 he had risen to the front rank of Cleveland's legal profession.[1]

Despite Chesnutt's relatively limited literary output, Robert Bone has noted that, "on the strength of his short stories alone, he raised the standards of Negro fiction to a new and higher plane."[2] And on the strength of "The Sheriff's Children" alone, Bone's judgment is justified. The story's plot is simple, reaching an apparent early climax with an O. Henryish twist which, on further reading, merely sets the scene for the moral crisis which is the tale's core.

Troy, North Carolina, a sleepy village so remote that the Civil War has not ravaged it, is the setting of "The Sheriff's Children." The war is not long over when old Captain Walker, who had "left an arm on the field of Gettysburg, had been foully murdered."[3] A strange-looking mulatto has been seen near the Captain's house near the time of the murder and he is quickly apprehended and incarcerated. Soon a lynch-mob assembles. News of approaching trouble quickly reaches the local sheriff who arms himself and hurries to the jail. He disperses the crowd, exchanging gunfire in the process, then absently places his pistol on a bench while he cradles a shotgun.

While the sheriff gazes out of a barred window after the retreating rabble, the unfettered prisoner grabs his pistol and disarms him. During the tense scene which ensues, the mulatto reveals he is actually the sheriff's son by a slave woman long since sold.

Had the story depended entirely upon the son's sudden revelation for its impact, it would merit no study. But the confrontation between father and son only paves the way for the seminal tension of the tale: The struggle within the father's soul between his basic decency, the reality of his past, and his oppressive sense of civil duty. Final high irony is achieved during the father's last visit with his mulatto son, placing the slaveholders' miscegenation complex in a perspective more meaningful than any descriptive scientist has achieved. Indeed, few other products of nineteenth-century Southern writing more clearly justify the "faith in the capacity of the literary imagination to expose moral and psychological complexities in such a way as to act as a brake upon the tendency of history . . . to reduce human experience to manageable simplicities."[4]

himself the product of racially mixed parents, Chesnutt's most persistent theme was a tortured search for identity by mulattoes. He worked mightily in his "blue-vein" stories to show his white readers that "people of mixed blood" were no different than Caucasians, even down to slavish concern for middle-class values and, in some instances, disdain for the black masses. "As a matter of fact," Chesnutt explained, "substantially all my writings, with the exception of The Conjure Woman, have dealt with the problems of people of mixed blood which, while in the main the same as those of the Negro, are in some instances and in some respects much more complex and difficult of treatment, in fiction as in life."[5] In "The Sheriff's Children" he shifted his emphasis from the half-world of the rejected mulatto son to the even darker confines of the white father's soul. The seminal question is how the father--an admirable man in every other respect--will reconcile the conflicting moral pressures engulfing him.

From the moment the sheriff asks, "Who are you?," and the mulatto replies, "Tom, Cicely's son, . . . Cicely whom you sold with her child to the speculator on his way to Alabama" (84-5), the essential tension of the story is exposed: The sheriff, a courageous, honorable man who has just risked his life while defending his prisoner from a lynch mob, is revealed to have fallen victim to the slave society's peculiar social disease, and he is rendered suddenly impotent by conflicting loyalties. What will he do? What can he do?

"Good God," he pleads, "you would not kill your own father?" The mulatto is unmoved:

> What father's duty have you ever performed for me? Did you give me your name, or even your protection? Other white men gave their colored sons freedom and money, and sent them to the free States. You sold me to the rice swamps. (85)

The sheriff cannot meaningfully reply. His son further informs him that Cicely has "died under the lash, because she had enough womanhood to call her soul her own." (86) This spoken to a man who has not even called his son his own.

Given an opportunity to save his own life if he will allow his son to escape the sheriff hesitates. "The struggle between his love of life and his sense of duty was a terrific one," the omniscient narrator explains.

> It may seem strange that a man who could hesitate as such a moment when his life was trembling in the balance. But the baleful influence of human slavery poisoned the very fountains of life and created new standards of right. The sheriff was conscientious; his conscience had merely been warped by his environment. (87)

The reader never learns what the sheriff's decision will be for the prisoner decides to kill him, only to be shot from behind by his half sister.

Before examining the sheriff's crucial night of mental and moral ferment, one should note the technical and artistic strengths Chesnutt employs in "The Sheriff's Children." The author's descriptive power is noteworthy, as is his use of assorted dialects within the dialogue of the story. Most important of all is Chesnutt's reliance on a single unifying metaphor--the Civil War--which organically links the varied currents of the story.

Describing the rural, isolated country near Troy, North Carolina, Chesnutt explains that the region is:

> . . . remote from railroads or navigable streams. To the north in Virginia, to the west in Tennessee, and all along the seaboard the war had raged; but the thunder of its echoes of Branson County, where the loudest sounds heard were the crack of some hunter's rifle, the baying of some deep-mouthed hound, or the yodel of some tuneful negro on his way through the pine forest. (61)

A bit later, the author describes an assemblage of local folk in the village following the murder of Captain Walker and the capture of the suspect.

> By the following morning the news of the capture had spread to the farthest limits of the county. A much larger number of people than usual came to town that Saturday,--bearded men in straw hats and blue homespun shirts, and butternut trousers of great amplitude of material and vagueness of outline; women in homespun frocks and slat-bonnets, with faces as expressionless as the dreary sandhills which gave them a meagre sustenance. (64)

In both the above-cited examples, Chesnutt displays his descriptive skill, creating economical, yet evocative, word pictures.

While the author's use of dialogue is somewhat less polished than his descriptive techniques, it is nonetheless a central element of the story's structure. Too much reliance on stereotypically static speech patterns weakens what might otherwise have been one of the strongest elements of the tale. Yet even with the almost melodramatic reliance upon levels of speech usage as a not too subtle leitmotif, Chesnutt's skill at reproducing the dialects of rural folk is remarkable. A gathering of white farmers discusses Captain Walker's murder:

> "I hear it 'lowed that Square Kyahtah's too sick ter hol' co'te this evenin'," said one, "an' that the purlim'nary hearin' 'll haf ter go over 'tel nex'week."
>
> A look of disappointment went round the crowd.
>
> "Hit's the durndes', meanes' murder ever committed in this caounty," said another, with moody emphasis.
>
> "I s'pose the nigger 'lowed the Cap'n had some greenbacks," observed a third speaker.
>
> "The Cap'n," said another, with an air of superior information, "has left two bairls of Confedrit money, which he 'spected 'ud be good some day er nuther." (65)

Two Negroes, a farm hand and a cook, hold a brief conversation:

> "Hoddy, Sis' Nance."
>
> "Hoddy, Brer Sam."
>
> "Is de shurff in," inquired the negro.
>
> "Yas, Brer Sam, he's eating his dinner," was the answer.

"Will yer ax 'im ter step to de do' a minute, Sis' Nance." (68)

The more refined speech patterns of the sheriff and his daughter are intended to reflect their superior education:

"Where are you going, father?" she asked. She had not heard the conversation with the negro.

"I am goin' over to the jail," responded the sheriff. "There's a mob comin' this way to lynch the nigger we've got locked up. But they won't do it," he added with emphasis.

"Oh father! don't go!" pleaded the girl, clinging to his arms; "they'll shoot you if you don't give him up."

"You never mind me, Polly, . . . I'll take care of myself and the prisoner too . . . (71)

There is justification for so contrasting the speech and behavior of the sheriff with that of the local populace, for it is vital to the impact of the story that the central figure be a man of exceptional quality. The contrast is never so clear as when the sheriff confronts the would-be lynch mob.

"Ef yer don't let us in," cried a voice, "we'll bu's the do' open."

"Bust away," answered the sheriff . . . "But I give you fair warning. The first man that tries it will be filled with buckshot. I'm sheriff of this county; I know my duty, and I mean to do it." (75)

It seems much less likely, however--and consequently less acceptable--that a slave boy who had been sold away to Alabama should speak in as refined a manner as does his father. "'For God's sake, Sheriff,' he murmured hoarsely, 'don't let 'em lynch me; I didn't kill the old man.'" (77) It is clearly the author's intent to link the members of the sheriff's family through their speech, a sort of crude leitmotif which allows the reader to understand relationships long before they are stated. The device seems inappropriate in this context, and one is tempted to wonder if Chesnutt has not, in this one respect, fallen again into his habit of trying to demonstrate that mulattoes are more white than Negro.

More impressive is the author's use of the Civil War as the central metaphor of the tale. From his first mention of the conflict--"To Branson County, as to most rural communities in the South, the war is the one historical event that overshadows all others" (60)--it is the author's one consistent point of reference: Characters are identified relative to their military experiences; episodes are described in martial terminology. The sheriff himself is referred to as "Colonel Campbell," and the mob he repulses includes "Maj' McDonald, . . . Kunnel Wright" and a "round shouldered farmer, who, in spite of his peaceable expression and faded gray eye, was known to have been one of the most daring followers of a rebel guerrilla chieftain, . . ." (66)

The sheriff's attitude is described as that "of a soldier." (69) Explaining to his daughter why he must face the prospective lynchers, he says: "Besides, I have faced fire too often to be scared away from my duty." (71) During the actual confrontation, he orders the mob to "right about face and march," mentioning once more that he has "faced fire." (76)

The mob, on the other hand, has not come prepared "to fight a battle" and has no leader willing "to lead an attack." (78) The mob is "restlessly awaiting orders," when one of its number shoots and the sheriff responds "with the instincts born of a semi-guerrilla army experience." (80)

Later, with his prisoner leveling a pistol at him, the sheriff remains cool, and his response is explained easily--"he had faced death more than once on a battlefield." (83) Later still, the sheriff binds the prisoner's wounds with "a rude skill acquired during his army life." (89) Ultimately, the most important military allusion in the story is the revelation that the sheriff was an "ardent supporter of the Union" throughout the early stages of the conflict between North and South. "Yielding at last to the force of circumstances, he had entered the Confederate service rather late in the war, and served with distinction through several campaigns, . . ." (72) No other single

aspect of the sheriff's life sets him farther apart from his fellows than does his unusual war record.

The purpose of both dialect differences and military allusions is to demonstrate the unique qualities of the sheriff. His superior cultivation is evidenced in his speech; his enlightenment is exemplified when he offers to share his dinner with a Negro; his courage and sense of duty cows the mob. "The Sheriff of Branson," the narrator boldly states, "was a man far above the average of the community." (71)

It is the sheriff's very quality that intensifies the magnitude of his crimes. Since he is clearly a superior man compelled by forces beyond his control, there is a hint of classic tragedy in his fall. With the revelation of the mulatto's actual identity, the sheriff remembers all too well: "He had been sorry for it many a time since. . . . He had yielded to the combination of anger and pecuniary stress." (85) The sin was truly personal, but the temptation was social, the unique product of a society which treated human beings as mere commodities.

In the solitude of his room that night after having secured his wounded son in a jail cell, the sheriff's mind is filled with "a flood of unaccustomed thoughts . . . all the acts of one's life stand out, in the clear light of truth in their correct proportions and relations. . . . He saw that he had owed some duty to this son of his,--that neither law nor custom could destroy a responsibility inherent in the nature of mankind." (91) As his remorse grows, the father admits he "could not thus, in the eyes of God at least, shake off the consequences of his sin." (91) He has given his son ". . . no name, no father, no mother . . .," yet the sheriff's sense of duty will not allow him to free the young man--civil duty, it seems, retains priority, for the sheriff assumes his son is innocent.

Finally deciding to work to secure an acquittal for the mulatto, then to devise a plan by which he might "in some degree atone for his crime against this son of his--against society--against God," (93) he returns to the jail to begin his process of atonement, only to find his son's lifeless body. "The prisoner had torn the bandage from his wound and bled to death during the night," (93) physically completing the bleeding process that had begun spiritually when his father sold him away to Alabama. The father has waited far too long to accept his responsibility.

Charles W. Chesnutt produced a high point in nineteenth-century American Negro literature with "The Sheriff's Children." By emphasizing the white father rather than the mulatto son, he partially avoided the melodramatic stereotypes which marred so much of his work. He here captured the moral dilemma intrinsic to chattel slavery, demonstrating its tragic effect on two lives: The son's death is, in a sense, the moral death of the father whose opportunity for direct expiation of his crime dies with his son.

It is sad comment upon American society that Chesnutt's masterpiece retains its impact not only as an historically valid story, but also as a parable for this nation's contemporary racial crisis and continuing moral atrophy. Who, one is tempted to ask, is the Sheriff, and who is the son bleeding to death in a prison while waiting for his father to acknowledge him?

Gerald W. Haslam
Sonoma State College
Rohnert Park, California

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[1]Earl Schenck Miers, Introduction, The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories by Charles Waddell Chesnutt (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1968), p. vii.

[2]Robert Bone, The Negro Novel in America (New Haven, 1965), p. 36.

[3]Chesnutt "The Sheriff's Children," The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1968), p. 63. All subsequent quotations from "The Sheriff's Children" will be from the listed source and will be cited in the text.

[4]Seymour L. Gross, "Introduction: Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," Images of the Negro in American Literature, edited by Gross and John Edward Hardy (Chicago, 1966), p. 2.

[5]Chesnutt, "Post-Bellum--Pre-Harlem," Breaking into Print, edited by Elmer Adler (New York, 1937), p. 51.

PAST AND PRESENT IN NEGRO AMERICAN DRAMA

The faces disappear from the screen. Momentarily, the room is dark. Then lights go on again. The spectators applaud. They have just witnessed a private showing of the film, The Game, adapted from the play Loop the Loop by George Bass, a Negro.

This is the new drama of Negro playwrights of the 1960's--a far cry from Langston Hughes' Mulatto of the Thirties or Richard Wright's Native Son of the Forties.

In earlier plays Negroes protested racial oppression in conventional ways. Langston Hughes told the all-too-familiar story of the mulatto youth who rebels against his white father, kills the father, and must be killed in turn. Richard Wright told the melodramatic story of the Negro youth of Chicago who, brutalized by the ghetto, murders to cover his fears and, in turn, is murdered by the state.

The drama of the Sixties stands apart from the Lorraine Hansberry and Ossie Davis drama of the Fifties. In A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry dramatized sympathetically but amusingly the tensions of a Negro family, who must fight themselves as well as the white world outside. In Purlie Victorious, Ossie Davis ridiculed the conventional stereotypes and myths as he told the story of a Negro who struggles to build a church for his people.

George Bass's The Game is different. Its ancestors are the morality plays of thirteenth-century England and the Expressionist drama of Germany before World War I. Its present-day relatives are found in the Theatre of the Absurd.

Its development is not conventional. It develops as music flows--relentlessly toward an end. It jerks with the frenzy of jazz and wails the soulcry of the blues, rising to crescendo in its coda, "Just a baby--all alone--can't get out."

Its protest is not the familiar complaint against repression, hostility, and abuse. It screams protest against life itself.

A room darkens on the seventeenth floor of the Pan-Am Building in New York City. Faces flash onto a small movie screen. They are the faces of dark-skinned children playing games.

The people watching cannot see the toys--not at first. A Negro girl tosses unseen jacks. A Negro youth in tight levis rapidly bats an unseen ball. A young Puerto Rican dribbles away from an unseen foe and scores a spectacular lay-up. These are the games of the ghetto.

A stranger appears--a coffee-and-cream colored youth who wears glasses and short pants and a beret. The others stop their play to watch the intruder. He wants to join them, but they do not want him.

They seek another spot to play. He follows. Annoyed, the Puerto Rican snatches the beret from the Negro's head, teases him with it, then indifferently drops it. Still the youth follows.

The intruder overtakes them at a slide. He wants to play but they attack him. He defends himself successfully. Then a treacherous blow when he is not looking sends him hurtling down the slide to the ground below. He lies motionless, his face against the dirt.

Free, they race away to climb on the rooftop to continue their game. They shout and sing.

Suddenly the intruder reappears, climbing onto the roof as if from a grave. The gang fade into the background, leaving their Puerto Rican leader face to face with the victim. The victim advances stubbornly. The leader retreats. The gang close in and surround the leader. The leader begins to wail, "I have to go home, I have to go home. I have to take care of my brother. He's just a baby, he's all alone."

Silently the gang hem him in, turning back his efforts to get out. They chant, "You can't get out, you can't get out, you can't get out, you can't get out."

The voices blur into one contrapuntal cry, "Just a baby--all alone. You can't get out." The intended victim, now the leader, looks on. His eyes are smiling.

Against the ghetto, where the only toys are conceived by the mind or constructed by the Public Works Department of the city. Against the world of people who automatically rebuff the stranger. Against the fickle mobs who in a moment turn on their leaders to make them the victims. Against life itself, in which we so-called adults are only children who are alone and ringed in by implacable Furies who will not let us escape.

The characters are Negro and Puerto Rican, for those are the people George Bass knows best. But the problem is not merely a problem of race. It is the problem of the suffering of all mankind.

If this is the direction of the new drama written by Negroes, it bears watching. This is a new creature for American drama, especially that written by Negroes. It has maturity and thought. The question is whether it will be admitted permanently to the Broadway stages, where significant thought is deplored unless written by an Englishman and where the Negro is believed to be unique in his suffering in the American utopia.

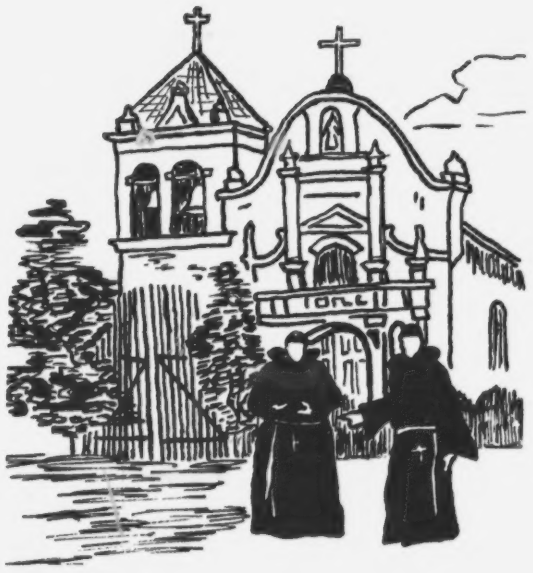
Darwin T. Turner, Dean
A & T College of North Carolina
Greensboro, North Carolina

Jean Paul Sartre

If an American Negro finds that he has a vocation as a writer, he discovers his subject at the same time. He is the man who sees the whites from the outside, who assimilates the white culture from the outside, and each of whose books will show the alienation of the black race within American society. Not objectively, like the realists, but passionately, and in a way that will compromise his reader. (What is Literature?, trans. Bernard Frechtman, New York, 1949, pp. 71-72.)

Submitted by

Prescott S. Nicholl
San Diego State College



GRASSROOTS: PLANNING NEGRO AMERICAN LITERATURE STUDIES

Father Blaise, the chairman of the English Department at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Southern Indiana, asked two of his fellow Benedictines to respond in writing to the above proposal. He kindly sent along their thoughtful reactions. It was felt wise to retain the spontaneity of the responses rather than formalize them into articles. (Ed.)

April 23, 1968

Dear Father Blaise,

Having just returned from Detroit where the question of Black Power in all its ramifications was lengthily discussed and being in the process of reading the Kerner Report, my reaction to the questions in regard to a course on the Negro in American Literature or an introduction of Negro American Literature into the curriculum is entirely different from what it would have possibly been some five years ago or even last year. Taking as my principle then that a liberal arts education is to make the student conversant with the world in which he must live by bringing to that world a tradition and a frame of reference, I would say that the study of the Negro in American Literature as well as the study of American Negro writers is a sine qua non for the educated American today, white or black.

There are several reasons for this. The first is based upon the fact that education must be for a confrontation with society on the part of the individual. The most rapid reading of the Kerner Report or any current articles will leave no doubt that the most serious problem affecting American society in particular and much of society in the third world is the growing division among races. In America the average Negro young adult feels himself a stranger in American society, without past and without identity. This is increasingly true not only of the young man in the Black Ghetto but even the middle class young Negro who may be in the university. Hence, the clamor for African History, American Negro History, Swahili, etc. The sad fact is that very deliberately names, such as Benjamin Banneker, Crispus Attucks, Denmark Vesey, Frederick Douglass have been kept out of the textbooks and out of the typical American History course. The result is that the American Negro feels he has no past worth remembering and the average white American is convinced that the Negro has no past or present worth respecting.

The same thing holds true in American literature. There were precious few female poets in the colonial period of our country. Probably none were exceptional. Still, it will be important for both the Negro student and the white student to know that among the female poets of Colonial America was a black female poet named Phillis Wheatley who made quite an impression in her day. I think that it is rather important for any student of American folklore to know America's indebtedness to African

folklore--as Joel Chandler Harris must admit. I think that it is important for those who study the development of English as a language in this country to recognize the enriching of the tongue with African expressions and words as well as the continued existence of African-based dialects as revealed in the research of Lorenzo Turner.

This is eminently true when we come to the literature of the Twentieth Century. I never heard an American teacher (i.e., white) refer to James Weldon Johnson. It took a Belgian Benedictine monk to read a passage from God's Trombones to force me to go back and discover Johnson for myself. And I dare say that for the average white American with a liberal arts education neither Langston Hughes nor Countee Cullen are any better known. I'm willing to wager that Europeans studying Twentieth Century American culture will have heard of the "Harlem Renaissance" of the twenties, but I doubt whether the American students will have. And this is true for the novelists. Richard Wright spent his last days in Paris. And despite the fact that his influence on the thought of this country was considerable, he is probably better remembered in France. William Faulkner is dead and Ralph Ellison is living; Faulkner has more books to his credit than Ellison does at present. Nevertheless, time, I think, will show that Faulkner's Light in August is a great American novel, but Ellison's The Invisible Man is truly greater from the point of view of technique as well as theme. Still, Ellison, the Negro author, is not too well known. The same holds for James Baldwin.

I say this because a similar phenomenon has occurred with the Jewish writers in this country. Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud are both unmistakably American writers and also Jewish. They are part of a whole school that we must notice in American literature as being both Jewish and American. We do this not out of condescension but because they merit it. The same is beginning to hold true for black American writers today. They are unmistakably American and unmistakably black. They merit recognition as both.

For this reason some very positive steps should be taken to put into the curriculum of the American literature courses some courses or lectures in the survey area dealing with the Negro in America and his effect on American literature. This will benefit both the young black man who cannot picture himself as part of America and the young white man for whom the Negro is truly invisible or today a potential threat. This will help correct the indictment of the Kerner Report which shows that education in white America continues to make its contribution along with every other institution in perpetuating the polarization of American society.

Before I close I might add that students for the priesthood must somewhere along the line be educated to the crisis of American society that they will be facing for the next several decades whether in the black ghetto or white suburbia. For them above all others the liberalizing influence of literature in today's world must be made known. For somehow or other they must be the ones to keep alive the dream of unity in a world of separation; unfortunately, so far the dream has been in a white man's English.

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to express my opinions.

Fraternally,

Father Cyprian

Jean Paul Sartre

One can imagine a good novel being written by an American Negro even if hatred of the whites were spread all over it, because it is the freedom of his race that he demands through this hatred. (What is Literature?, trans. Bernard Frechtman, New York, 1949, pp. 71-72.)

Submitted by

Prescott S. Nicholl
San Diego State College

April 25, 1968

Dear Father Blaise,

First of all, I'd subscribe to the magazine, Negro American Literature Forum.

What kind of course--a whole semester (or year) or part of another course--is a question.

a) A purely Negro literature course--such as David Lewis is teaching at Breadloaf this semester (racial characterization and racial issues in the 19th and 20th century literature)--seems to me to have too much accent on "racial" rather than on cultural--although I'll bet the course is good.

b) A course as the Negro Renaissance (I think that is the usual name for the resurgence of white interest in Negro culture during the 20's, although it clustered somewhat in Harlem). "Harlem Renaissance" excludes such important writers as Du Bose Heyward, a South Carolinian (Porgy, novel, to play, to opera Porgy and Bess; Mamba's Daughters, novel, dramatized later). Julia Peterkin, a South Carolinian (Scarlet Sister Mary, novel; Green Thursday, short stories). This is to name but two white writers putting out popular works about the Negro--from the "fate" angle rather than from the "racist." Scarlet Sister Mary won the Pulitzer Prize.

Carl Van Vechten, New Yorker, wrote Nigger Heaven in the thick of the avant garde Harlem movement in the 20's.

c) The idea Ralph Ellison was proposing at Milwaukee and in his writing . . . . a cultural problem, not a race problem--or solution--the effect of the Negro's use of music, poetry, etc., from colonial times on . . . their adaptation of "white" culture and its very definite effect on the same culture.

Perhaps a reference to my university experience during the 20's is opportune. Such names as Father Cyprian brought up were not new to me and all the names, whether of Negro or white writers, are to be found in American Authors (Kunitz?) in the original volume, not just kicked in to the Supplement--as well as in the Oxford Companion to American Literature. Phillis Wheatley was as easily identifiable in my mind as Anne Bradstreet, a half century earlier--although I doubt if Father Cyprian knows the latter (white).

The materials are to be found. How to collate them, I don't know, but I do think racial rather than cultural perpectives would be very poorly taken--divisive surely.

Some of my great theater experiences in the 20's and 30's were Green Pastures--with the Hall Johnson Choir in the orchestra pit (singing in between acts) and recognizing that the rather lanky girl in the chorus of Shuffle Along, an all Negro musical show, had more personality than the principals--her name, Josephine Baker. Whether I was white or the performer-artists were Negroes made no difference to me (nor I am sure to the audience at large). We were seeing an authentic artistic presentation.

What, if any effect, did the African history course of 1966-1967 have on the students at Saint Meinrad--or how did it help with the problem of recognizing Negro contributions across the board to an American culture? I should think a literature course touching any of the possibilities I have mentioned would need much careful preparation to be of lasting value--else why does Father Cyprian speak of a Harlem Renaissance--and I recall little between the 20's and the entrance of Wright and Ellison on the scene--too sporadic!

Random thoughts I leave you to disentangle!

In Saint Benedict,

Father Alaric

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

Richard Wright: A Biography, by Constance Webb. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Inc., 1968. Pp. 443. $8.95.

Miss Webb's book is an insightful, poignant, absorbing account of the life of one of America's most significant writers. (Most American critics, for reasons too complex to go into here, have not yet acknowledged the truth of the latter judgment.) This is the first biography of Wright and it is undoubtedly an invaluable contribution to the scholarship and criticism about the writer and his work. The knowledge to be gained here of the life and career of Richard Wright will allow the man and his work to be seen in greater depth and sharper and clearer perspective than heretofore. Given the fact that this biography reveals so much about Wright, much that even his closest friends must not have known about him, it cannot help but be welcomed enthusiastically by all except those whose sympathy, understanding, knowledge and acceptance of his work are imperfect.

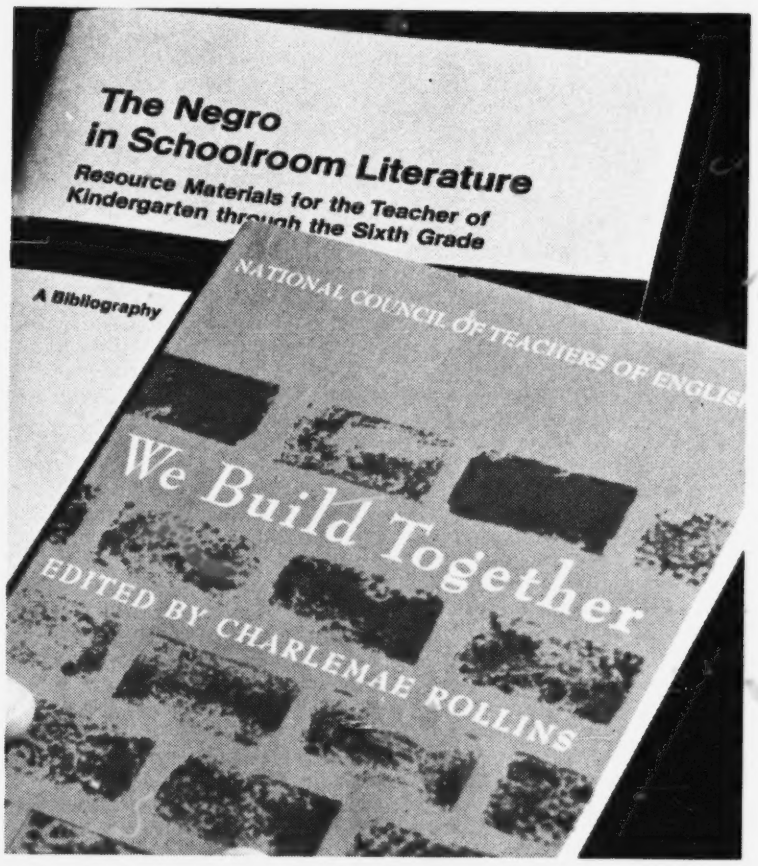
Two charges have been brought against the book by previous reviewers, "carping criticisms" might be the better term. One is that Miss Webb has been too close to her subject; that she knew Wright so well during his life and felt so positively toward him that she is overwilling to take his word on the meaning of various events in his life and hence is not an objective biographer. This is sheer nonsense and masks some need on the part of the reviewer to put the book down (as he has responded negatively to practically everything he has touched relating to black writers and their writing). Since one is rather unlikely to view his friends "objectively," is it not strange to require that the biographer should do so? But more important, is it not a distinct advantage to have had the biography written by a person who knew the subject so intimately, who was a friend for over twenty years? And further, would it not have been presumptuous for the writer to substitute her judgments for Wright's when she had his perspective available to her?

The other charge has been that Miss Webb has been rather weak on her critical interpretations of Wright's works, that she rarely does more than simply recount plots when she discusses the major works. This hardly seems to me a fault. Miss Webb does not pretend to be a literary critic. Her book is subtitled "A Biography" not "A Critical Biography." Hence she has no responsibility to bring to bear on Wright's work the insight of the literary critic. She comments on his work, granted, but only with the intention of revealing some facet of the character or progress of his thought at a given time.

Those parts of the biography which are based upon Wright's own published works, on Black Boy, "I Tried to be a Communist," Pagan Spain, for example, are likely to be boring to one very familiar with those writings, but I doubt that they would bore one who was not thoroughly familiar with them. These sections do not comprise the major portion of the book in any case, and are somewhat balanced by the wealth of new material in the book. The information gleaned from Wright's diaries and letters is often fascinating and revealing.

The book has faults, but what biography does not? Miss Webb's achievement is of such scope and magnitude that only the most egocentric and unsympathetic critic could find it worthwhile to point them out, only the critic who is smug enough to feel that his judgment and perspicacity have any meaning whatsoever in the face of so solid a work of scholarship. Miss Webb's book was sorely needed. Let us be thankful for it and hope it will be the first of several biographies of Wright.

Donald B. Gibson
Department of English
University of Connecticut
Storrs, Connecticut



We Build Together, ed. by Charlamae Robbins. Third revision, 1967. National Council of Teachers of English, 508 S. 6th St., Champaign, Ill. $1.50.

The Negro in Schoolroom Literature (Resource Materials for the Teacher of Kindergarten Through the Sixth Grade), by Minnie W. Koblitz. Second edition, 1967. Center for Urban Education, 32 West 42nd St., New York, N. Y. 10036. 25¢.

Described in Muriel Crosby's foreword as "an important tool in the education of all children," the new revision of We Build Together is perhaps the single most important guide to Negro life and literature for elementary and high school use.

Essentially a carefully annotated bibliography, We Build Together includes books in the areas of picture books and easy-to-read books; fiction; history; biography (collective and individual); poetry, folklore and music; science; and sports (fiction and non-fiction). Also included are references to further sources dealing with Negro literature and heritage, especially as applicable to the elementary and secondary schools.

One of the most heartening aspects of the bibliography is that it carefully avoids the pit into which too many bibliographies in children's and adolescent's literature fall--oversimplified and praising annotations which give the reader little help in assessing the relative merit or potential use of the book. When you see comments such as the following, then you know you are dealing with hard-nosed reality: "style is adequate, plot is weak"; "writing is marred by artificial dialogue"; "illustrations are stereotypes"; "difficult vocabulary, but thought-provoking situations"; "incidents seem contrived, but on the whole the story is realistic and constructive."

Beyond the excellence of the annotations and the usefulness of the lists is an additional factor which contributes to the importance of this guide. The twenty-page introduction by Charlamae Rollins and Marion Edman is a moving testimonial to the changes that have taken place and that are taking place in the publishing of fiction and non-fiction for young people. [Mrs. Rollins is herself the author of two fine biographies for young people--Famous American Negro Poets (Dodd, 1965) and They Showed the Way: Forty American Negro Leaders (Crowell, 1964)--and the editor of an anthology of Christmas poems, songs, and stories by or about Negroes, Christmas Gif' (Follett, 1963.)]

This change that has taken place in the world of realistic and truthful fiction and non-fiction for young people is best exemplified by the fact that "in this edition, it has not been necessary to include every book for children ever published on the Negro in America, as was true in the first edition (1941)." The 1941 committee was hard pressed to find books that offered a true picture of Negroes in contemporary life. Even then, the committee was forced to include Little Black Sambo!

By the time of the second revision in 1948, We Build Together was able to expand to 500 titles. Poorly written and unacceptable titles were still

found, however, and the committee felt it necessary to repeat the guidelines which had been set up for the first edition. These guidelines, which appear in this edition, "make it clear again to those writing and publishing books about Negroes, and to those selecting them, that care must be taken. . . ."

An intriguing and highly informative explanation of these guidelines goes into the use and misuse of stereotypes, the problems of language (both dialect and false idiom), the place of realistic illustrations, and the importance of an accurate approach to folklore and history.

We Build Together is more than a guide to Negro life and literature for teachers and librarians. All interested in fostering better human relations and understandings need We Build Together. Parents--especially white--should find this a valuable guide in leading their children to understand that, ultimately, "we build together!"

The Negro in Schoolroom Literature is an annotated listing of over two hundred fifty books, current to September 1, 1966. Some of the forty-five books "deliberately excluded...were, in a variety of ways, offensive or inaccurate." Some, such as a new edition of Uncle Tom's Cabin, "have also been included, though in some cases somewhat reluctantly because of the tendency for dialect stories to contain elements of ridicule and stereotyping."

Although this bibliography is limited by intent to use in the elementary school, many of the books included could be and are recommended by the reviewer for use in the junior and even senior high school, especially with lower ability readers. This volume is, then, less comprehensive in scope, and, unfortunately, in treatment than We Build Together.

This is not to say The Negro in Schoolroom Literature is not of value. Less expensive ($.25) than We Build Together ($1.50) and published earlier, this volume makes no pretense of being as comprehensive. This is simply a slimmer volume which would make a good basic introduction to the field of children's Negro literature for any teacher or parent.

One thing disturbs me about this volume. The exclusion of dialect stories because of the supposed "tendency to contain elements of ridicule and stereotyping" may be true. However, I feel that exclusion simply because a story contains dialect is linguistically dishonest. Inclusion in a story of false idiom and false dialect which is not geographically, socially, or historically accurate should lead to the exclusion and denunciation of that story. However, if the dialect is accurate to the social setting and the period of the story, that story must not be excluded from a bibliography of this nature for that reason alone.

Applied to both of these bibliographies, Minnie W. Koblitz's paraphrase of Emma Sterne's comment is especially meaningful. "A bibliography such as this one will be unnecessary when skin color becomes irrelevant on the American and world scene."

Bruce C. Appleby
Department of English
Southern Illinois University
at Carbondale

Hold Fast to Your Dream, by Catherine Blanton. Archway Paperback. New York: Washington Square Press, 1967. 50¢. (First published by Julian Messner, Inc., New York, 1955.)

Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers, by Milton J. Shapiro. Archway Paperback. New York: Washington Square Press, 1957. 50¢. (First published by Julian Messner, Inc., New York, 1957.)

In the first of these books, Emmy Lou, a Negro high school student, discovers that the invisible wall of prejudice in a northern school can be as tangibly restrictive as the walls of segregation that blocked her ambition to become a dancer in the South. Miss

Blanton handles each issue deftly and fairly. She weaves skillfully and dramatically a real, heartwarming story where acceptance and success require carefully structured and sharpened social skills and prideful determination.

The second title presents a dramatic sports biography telling how an infielder (1947), John Roosevelt Robinson, became the first Negro player in the major leagues since Welday and Moses Walker, brothers, played for Toledo in the American Association, then a major league, in 1884. Robinson, brought into organized baseball by Branch Rickey, president of the Dodgers, then in Brooklyn, helped the Dodgers win the pennant in his first year and received the National League's Most Valuable Player Award in his third year. The Cleveland Indians followed Rickey's lead with Larry Doby, a slugging outfielder, and in 1948, with Leroy ("Satchel") Page, the famous pitching star of the Negro leagues. Within a few years all of the major league teams had added Negro athletes to their rosters and there were many Negro players in the minors.

We agree with Mr. Shapiro that it is "practically impossible to pinpoint the exact moment racial prejudice first hits home to the child"; when he realizes for the first time that the difference in the color of his skin makes him the special target of "taunts, insults, slurs, physical attacks, deprivation of opportunities, a hundred different manifestations of the psychological distillate of man's fears and anxieties."

Both authors balance heartbreak with school friendships, with young adult matters, with the urge to plan for marriage and a decent livelihood, and with gay parties so that the contents of their books are real in both story interest and in building a better understanding toward meeting challenges to young Americans' problems. They have put together plots and subplots that present topical matter in a fashion accessible to young people without sacrificing values, standards of beauty, conduct and accomplishment. Mr. Shapiro has treated Jackie Robinson more realistically, while Miss Blanton has sought a sentimentalized and not a very convincing solution for Emmy Lou's problem. Both books are dramatic contributions in that Jackie Robinson and Emmy Lou successfully meet the challenge, overcome abuse and pave the way for other members of their race to "break into" career fields formerly closed to Negroes. Who can ever forget Mallie Robinson's caution: "Don't let yourself down, Jackie. Or your race"?

Inciters to racial violence, now rampant in too many cities, can heed the approach techniques set forth in this biography and this story. Heretofore, black has been a stigma, a curse; but, now, it is becoming a badge of courage, of pride, rather than scorn--a new self-image and consciousness.

Claramae B. Long
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